

NEWS IN
brief

Bali airport reopens

AFP, Denpasar

Bali's international airport opened for business yesterday after a nearly three-day shutdown, as towering columns of volcanic ash and smoke shifted direction on the Indonesian resort island. The move raised hope for some of the more than 120,000 tourists stranded after a surge in activity at Mount Agung had grounded hundreds of flights since Monday, sparking travel chaos.

50 dead in South Sudan tribal raids

AFP, Juba

Fifty people were killed in raids by a tribal militia in eastern South Sudan, a local official said yesterday, the latest in a series of attacks between rival communities. The official said eight people died in an attack on Monday in Jonglei state, while a follow-up raid on Tuesday left 23 women killed and 19 men killed. Both attacks were carried by armed men from the Murle ethnic group targeting Dinkas.

Regime team joins Syria peace talks

AFP, Geneva

Syrian government negotiators arrived in Geneva yesterday to join United Nations-backed peace talks to end the civil war, adamant that they will not tolerate any discussion of President Bashar al-Assad's ouster. A government delegation landed in the Swiss city on Wednesday, reportedly after securing key concessions from UN mediator Staffan de Mistura, including keeping the Assad issue off the table.

Yahoo hacking suspect pleads guilty in US

REUTERS

Karim Baratov, a Canadian accused by US of helping Russian intelligence agents break into email accounts as part of a massive 2014 breach of Yahoo accounts, pleaded guilty on Tuesday, the US Justice Department said. It announced charges in March against Baratov and three other men, including two officers in Russia's Federal Security Service for their roles in the 2014 theft of 500 million Yahoo accounts.



BREXIT NEGOTIATIONS

EU hopes deal on divorce bill next week

AFP, Berlin

The EU's Brexit negotiator yesterday denied reports that Britain and the bloc have a deal on the UK's final divorce bill, but said he hoped an accord could be reached next week.

"We read a lot of things on this subject in the press these days," said Barnier, referring to reports in British media that London and Brussels have agreed on the UK's financial obligations but had not settled on an exact amount for the so-called divorce bill.

But he stressed that "we still have work to do, the negotiation is not over on this subject."

The Telegraph has reported that London and Brussels have now accepted the British will pay between 45 and 55 billion euros (\$53-63 billion), with the final figure depending "on how each side calculates the output from an agreed methodology".

Meanwhile the FT reported Britain would cover EU liabilities worth as much as 100 billion euros, but if structured as net payments over many decades, that could drop to less than half that amount.



(From Left to right) Former Croatian PM Jadranko Prlic, former Bosnian Croat Defense Minister Bruno Stojic, former Croatian general Slobodan Praljak (C), former Bosnian Croat army officer Milivoj Petkovic and former Croatian military official Valentin Coric are pictured yesterday prior to the judgment in their appeals case at the Hague international court. The picture collage shows Slobodan Praljak drinking poison after court upheld sentence against him.

PHOTO: AFP



'Bookkeeper of Auschwitz', 96, fit to go to jail
Says German court

REUTERS, Berlin

A German court ruled yesterday that a 96-year-old German known as the "bookkeeper of Auschwitz" was fit to go to prison, rejecting his plea for the sentence to be suspended.

Oskar Groening, who is physically frail, was sentenced to four years in prison in 2015 for his role in the murder of 300,000 people at the Nazi death camp Auschwitz.

However, he had not started serving his sentence due to a legal argument about his health.



Prosecutors said in August that a medical examination showed Groening was fit to start serving his prison sentence, though Groening's lawyer disputed that.

Yesterday, a court in the northern German town of Celle said: "The higher regional court thinks, based on expert opinion, that the convicted man is able to serve his term despite his advanced age."

It said enforcing Groening's sentence would not breach his fundamental rights and added that special needs related to his age could be catered for in prison.

Chaos hits UN war crimes court

Bosnian Croat defendant 'takes poison', dies after failed appeal bid; hearing suspended

AFP, The Hague

The UN war crimes court for former Yugoslavia descended into chaos during its last judgement yesterday when a Bosnian Croat defendant appeared to take poison to protest the upholding of his 20-year jail term.

UN judges were handing down judgement in the appeals case of six former Bosnian Croat political and military leaders, in the court's final verdict for war crimes committed during the bloody 1990s break-up of Yugoslavia.

Seconds after his sentence was upheld, former military commander Slobodan Praljak, 72, shouted out angrily: "Praljak is not a criminal. I reject your verdict."

He then raised a small brown bottle to his lips, and drank it down in full view of the cameras filming the hearing.

He died in hospital, according to Croatia's state-run news agency HINA quoting a source close to Praljak.

The unprecedented scenes came just after the judges also upheld a 25-year prison term against Jadranko Prlic, the former prime minister of a breakaway Bosnian Croat statelet, and a 20-year term for its former defence minister Bruno Stojic.

But the hearing was then quickly suspended as Praljak's lawyer shouted out: "My client says he has taken poison."

As court officials surrounded grey-haired and bearded Praljak, presiding judge Carmel Agius immediately ordered the proceedings suspended and the curtains screening the courtroom were abruptly closed to the public.

Praljak was specifically charged with

ordering the destruction of Mostar's 16th-century bridge in November 1993, which judges in the first trial had said "caused disproportionate damage to the Muslim civilian population".

A symbol of Bosnia's devastation in the war, the Ottoman-era bridge was later rebuilt. But the city saw the worst of the Croat-Muslim clashes, with nearly 80 percent of the city's east destroyed in the fighting.

But in their ruling, the judges in fact allowed part of Praljak's appeal, saying the bridge had been a legitimate military target during the conflict. They also had overturned some of his convictions, but refused to reduce his overall sentence.

The case has been keenly watched in Zagreb, and the appeal judges said that all six men, who had been found guilty of

taking part in a scheme to remove Bosnian Muslims, "remained convicted of numerous and very serious crimes."

They have not yet passed judgement on the remaining three defendants: Milivoj Petkovic, 68, Valentin Coric, 61, and Bratislav Pusic, 65.

The bloody 1992-1995 war in Bosnia, in which 100,000 people died and 2.2 million were displaced, mainly pitted Bosnian Muslims against Bosnian Serbs, but also saw some brutal fighting between Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats after an initial alliance fell apart.

Yesterday's verdict comes a week after the judges imposed a life sentence on former Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladic, whose ruthlessness in the conflict earned him the title the "Butcher of Bosnia".

ANTI-GRAFT DRIVE

Senior Saudi prince freed in \$1b settlement agreement

REUTERS, Riyadh

Senior Saudi Arabian prince Miteb bin Abdullah, once seen as a leading contender to the throne, has been freed after agreeing to pay over \$1 billion to settle corruption allegations against him, a Saudi official said yesterday.



backs, inflating government contracts, extortion and bribery, could not be independently verified.

Saudi authorities, who estimate they could eventually recover around \$100 billion of illicit funds, have been working on reaching agreements with suspects detained at Riyadh's luxurious Ritz Carlton hotel, asking them to hand over assets and cash in return for their freedom.

Apart from Miteb, the Saudi official said that at least three other suspects had finalised settlement agreements. The prosecutor has decided to put at least five people on trial, the official said without disclosing their identities.

The fate of billionaire Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, chairman of investment firm Kingdom Holding and one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent international businessmen, was not known.

Prince Miteb is the first senior figure known to be released among those detained. Around 200 people in total have been questioned in the crackdown, authorities said earlier this month.

The allegations, which include kick-



Pope Francis shakes hands with Bhaddanta Kumarabhivarma, chairman of the state Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, during a meeting with the Buddhist committee in Yangon, Myanmar November 29, 2017.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ANTI-MUSLIM TWEETS

White House defends president Trump

CNN, Washington

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders defended President Donald Trump's decision to retweet a series of anti-Muslim videos from a British far-right account on Wednesday morning, telling reporters he circulated them to start a conversation about border security and immigration.

Sanders also said she doesn't know how the videos got in front of Trump and wouldn't say whether they were real.

"Whether it is a real video, the threat is real," Sanders told a small group of reporters after appearing on Fox News.

The retweets have once again thrust his administration into conversation about anti-Muslim bias as the courts are weighing the legality of Trump's travel ban and raised questions about how content swirling on the Internet ends up on the President's powerful Twitter account.

Trump is no stranger to anti-Islam comments that has roiled his supporters and critics alike.

During the 2016 election, Trump told CNN that he believes "Islam hates us," a comment that rankled some Republicans.

"There's something there that -- there's a tremendous hatred there," Trump said. "There's a tremendous hatred. We have to get to the bottom of it. There's an unbelievable hatred of us."



Eight men and a woman holding Turkish citizenship, who were arrested on suspected links to a leftist militant group outlawed in Turkey following an operation by Greek security services, are escorted by anti-terrorism police officers to the prosecutor's office in Athens, Greece, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US EMBASSY IN JERUSALEM

Trump 'actively considering' move

AFP, New York

US President Donald Trump is "actively considering when and how" to move the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, his vice president said Tuesday, evoking a campaign promise that the administration had sidelined.

Mike Pence made the remarks in a keynote address at an event in New York commemorating the 70th anniversary of the UN vote for partition of Palestine, which led to the creation of the state of Israel.

"President Donald Trump is actively considering when and how to move the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem," Pence told the gathering of UN ambassadors, diplomats and Jewish leaders.

On June 1, Trump shied away from what was a major campaign promise by signing a legal waiver that keeps the embassy in Tel Aviv. The next six-month waiver is due to be signed this week.

"It's a question of when, not if," a US official said on June 1.

During his campaign for the White House, Trump expressed support for moving the embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but did not renew the call -- which would anger Palestinians and Arab states -- when he visited Jerusalem this year.

In 1995, Congress passed a law making it US policy to move the embassy to Jerusalem.

But the law contains a clause that has allowed each president since to issue and renew a six-month waiver on carrying out the move.

Pence, who is to visit Jerusalem next month, said he would address the Israeli parliament during the trip and "bring a message of resolve and commitment to draw the United States and Israel even closer together, and to stand together in defense of that which we hold dear."

He said the UN had "too often" become "a forum for invective in the form of anti-Semitism and hatred" but vowed "the days of Israel-bashing at the United Nations are over."

"I'm pleased to report today that America's support for Israel's security is at a record level today," he said.

The administration was "committed" to bringing peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said. Trump would "never compromise the safety and security of the Jewish State of Israel," he added.

Pence on Tuesday attended a symbolic re-enactment of the November 29, 1947 UN General Assembly vote, on the eve of its 70th anniversary.

